

DATA PROTECTION

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HIGHLIGHTS

This survey was requested by Directorate General Internal Market, Unit E4
- Media and data protection - and coordinated by Directorate General Press and
Communication

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This Eurobarometer 60.0 report looks at EU citizens' views on privacy relating to information held about them by a variety of public and private organisations and related data protection issues.

GENERAL

Throughout this survey, it was apparent that fundamental variations in attitude are usually based upon a country-by-country view rather than on particular socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education or occupation.

The main findings of the survey are as follows:

1. PROTECTION OF CITIZENS' PRIVACY

- 60% of all EU citizens were concerned, **to a greater or lesser degree**, about the broad issue of the protection of their personal privacy.
- More than half the Greeks (58%) and Swedes (54%) were **very concerned** about this issue compared with just 13% of Danes, Spanish and Portuguese.

2. CITIZENS' TRUST IN ORGANISATIONS HOLDING PERSONAL INFORMATION

Respondents' attitudes towards various institutions and organisations in relation to the use to which they put personal information showed that:

- **Medical services and doctors** were held in particularly high regard. 84% of EU15 citizens trusted the medical profession to use their personal information in an acceptable way and, in Denmark and the Netherlands, this was a sentiment held by more than nine out of ten citizens polled.
- 48% of EU15 citizens do not trust **insurance companies** to use their personal information in an acceptable way, although Finland's insurance companies are held in high esteem by 77% of that country's poll.
- 52% of the EU15 poll do not trust **credit card companies** with figures ranging from 23% in Finland to 80% in Greece.
- 55% of EU citizens say they trust **banks and financial institutions** with figures ranging from 36% in Greece and 44% in both France and Ireland to 81% in Sweden and 86% in Finland.
- The belief that **employers** could be trusted to use personal information in an acceptable way was held by 55% of EU15 citizens polled. Danish employers were the most trusted in the EU with a figure of 72% in contrast to employers in Greece (44%) and Spain (46%).
- The highest level of trust on **police** use of personal information was noted in the Nordic countries where figures of 87% were recorded in Finland, 85% in Denmark and 81% in Sweden. At the other end of the scale, only 64% of Belgians trusted the police to use personal information in an acceptable way.
- Trust in **tax authorities'** appropriate use of personal data was greatest in Finland (80%) and in Sweden (81%) and lowest in Ireland (50%), Italy (52%) and Belgium (53%).

- Across the European Union, 53% of those polled did not trust **credit reference agencies** to use personal information in an acceptable way. The least trusting nations were Greece and the UK (62%), closely followed by France (61%).
- Mail order companies' use of personal information is not trusted by two-thirds (68%) of EU15 citizens and this figure reaches 75% in France.
- While 41% of EU citizens trust non-profit organisations, this average conceals figures as low as 31% in Greece and as high as 54% in Portugal.
- Market and opinion research companies were trusted with personal data by 43% of EU15 citizens. The highest level of trust was observed in Denmark at 56% in contrast to only 34% of the Irish poll.

3. VIEWS ON DATA GATHERING AND PRIVACY OF INFORMATION

- Nine out of ten EU citizens tended to agree that they should be informed why organizations are **gathering** their personal data and whether these are being **shared** with other organizations.
- Contributing to the 46% EU15 average of those considering that **their country has a high level of personal data protection** are three countries (Finland, Sweden and Denmark) where the figures exceed 60% and three countries (Greece, Spain and Portugal) where the maximum figure is 33%.
- More than two-thirds of EU citizens (70%) felt that **people's awareness about personal data** protection in their country was low. The EU15 average conceals a spread of opinion ranging from 57% in Austria to 83% in France.
- Virtually two-thirds (64%) of EU15 citizens polled said they were worried about **leaving personal information**, such as their name, address, date of birth **on the Internet**.
- **Across the EU, 34% did not know whether their national legislation could cope with the issue of personal information on the Internet.** This figure reached 50% in Portugal and 48% in Spain compared with 19% in Finland and 25% in the Netherlands.
- Making up the 82% EU15 average who tended to agree with the statement that **organizations that keep personal information should not be allowed to transfer these without the owner's consent** were 90% of Finns but only 73% of the Spanish and 72% of the Portuguese.
- When asked whether they felt that **other countries' data protection laws are as effective as those in the EU**, 44% of those polled said they 'didn't know'. Amongst those agreeing with the statement was a very high percentage of Finns (77%) and 55% or more of Swedes, Austrians, Luxembourgers and Dutch. At the other end of this scale were countries, such as Spain (37%) and Portugal and the UK (40%).

4. KNOWLEDGE OF LEGISLATION AND DATA PROTECTION PRACTICE

- Two-thirds (68%) of EU citizens were not aware of the existence of independent authorities monitoring the application of data protection laws, hearing complaints from individuals and imposing sanctions on law breakers. The figures ranged from 52% in the Netherlands to 78% in Belgium and Portugal.
- Only 32% of EU15 citizens had heard of **laws granting individuals access to their personal data held by others and the right to correct or remove data which are inaccurate or have been obtained unlawfully**. However, this figure included numbers as disparate as 13% in Greece and 53% in Italy.
- Amongst the 42% of EU15 citizens who were aware that **those collecting personal information are obliged to provide individuals with certain information such as their identity and the purpose of the data collection** were wide variations on a country-by-country basis. In Italy and Sweden, the figures were 60% or above while in Austria, Portugal and Luxembourg, the figures did not exceed 24%.
- Almost half (49%) of EU15 citizens polled had heard about the **right to opt-out, i.e. to object to the use of personal information for the purpose of direct marketing**. While this knowledge was claimed by 73% of the Finnish poll and 61% in Sweden, the figure was only 31% in Spain, 32% in Luxembourg and 33% in Portugal and Greece.
- Across the European Union, 49% of citizens had heard of the need to provide agreement for someone to use their personal information and their right to oppose some uses compared with the 42% who had not heard of this.

5. TOOLS FOR THE PROTECTION OF DATA PRIVACY

- 72% of EU citizens had never heard of the **tools or technologies designed to limit the collection of personal data when people use the Internet** but, again, this average figure hides substantial variations by country. In Greece, the figure rises to 81% while in Sweden the figure is only 58%.
- The 18% of those who had heard about these tools but had never used them were then asked why. The prime reason cited by 30% of this group was that they **would not know how to use them**. This was the situation affecting 35% of Greeks and 34% of Germans, Spaniards and Italians - in contrast to only 16% of the Irish.
- A second technological reason concerned the **inability to install them on a computer** and was quoted by 21% of the poll. This was the most common reason claimed by 33% of Dutch people as opposed to only 9% of Greeks.

6. THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND THE MONITORING OF COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone monitoring:

- 40% of the EU15 sample believed that the **monitoring of telephone calls should be allowed for those suspected of terrorist activities**. Within this figure were 58% of Finns and 53% of Swedes.
- The second most popularly held view (33% of the poll) took the view that telephone calls should not be monitored as the **rights of individuals must always be respected**. Keen to defend the citizen's right were 48% of Greeks and Austrians and 45% of the Irish.

Internet monitoring

- 40% of EU citizens felt that monitoring of people using the Internet should only take place on those suspected of terrorist activities.
- However, there was less support for the **rights of the individual** when related to the Internet than the telephone and, accordingly, only 25% of the EU15 considered this to be the stance that should be taken. This view, however, generated particularly strong support in Greece (41%) and Austria (40%).